



White Paper

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# How do you dub a Hollywood star? The French Angelina Jolie (and others) explain....


*While they are known intimately to millions of movie fans worldwide, they might not get recognised on their way to the grocery store.*

Who are we talking about? The voice-over professionals who provide foreign-language dubbing for Hollywood's biggest stars, from Tom Cruise to Angelina Jolie.

Very often, film studios use the same voice-over artist to play a particular actor's voice in movies throughout their career.

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For audiences in non-English-speaking countries, it provides consistency and dramatic integrity. It means, for example, that Robert de Niro's German voice in *Taxi Driver* (1976) is still recognisable as the one used nearly a quarter of a century later in *Meet the Parents* (2000).

So who are the voice-over stars so widely heard but rarely seen? And what goes into bringing a world-famous actor's voice to life in an entirely different language?

Here, we find out from the professionals themselves about what it takes to create a voice-over for the stars.

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## **Françoise Cadol, France – Angelina Jolie, Sandra Bullock, Patricia Arquette**

In France, the all-action hero Lara Croft looks like Angelina Jolie but she sounds like [Françoise Cadol](#).

The voice-over professional has also dubbed roles for Hollywood stars such as Sandra Bullock, Patricia Arquette and Chinese-Singaporean actor Gong Li. In fact, she reports that occasionally a French fan will find her number and call her up – just to hear her voice.

In an [interview with \*The Guardian\*](#), she explains why she thinks voice-overs are important to audiences.

“People feel they know the voice and they want to know you,” she says. “A voice is a very moving thing. Dubbing is taken seriously in France, and people get very upset if an actor who has dubbed a star for a long time suddenly changes. Audiences want continuity.”

And, in a nice twist of fate, she also reports that she gets on well with the French actor who voices Brad Pitt, Jolie's former husband and co-star in *Mr and Mrs Smith* (2005).

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## **Dennis Schmid-Foß, Germany – Eddie Murphy, Ryan Reynolds, Simon Pegg**

German voice-over professional Dennis Schmid-Foß has dubbed dialogue for a wide range of English-speaking actors from Eddie Murphy to Simon Pegg.

In an interview on [YouTube](#), he comments that the pace of voice-over work has quickened over the years. “We used to do 10-15 takes an hour at most, and today fast voice actors can do 40 takes,” he says.

He also notes, regretfully, that it’s now much more common to do voice-overs on your own rather than with an ensemble of other voice-over actors in the same room. “When I started as a dubbing artist, I was still standing in front of the microphone together with all the experienced colleagues [...] there are so many nuances, that’s what makes it so special... and that’s how I was able to learn.”

But he’s still clear on what the hallmark of good dubbing is: you don’t even notice it.

“You will always notice a bad synchronisation immediately, [but] with a good one [you don’t]. That’s how I feel too, I don’t even listen and wonder ‘Oh who is that now, who is that speaking?’... I just enjoy the movie and forget that it’s dubbed, and that’s the best case.”

And, while the world of 21st-century dubbing may be a lonelier one, Schmid-Foß still doesn’t have to look far for professional advice on how to bring Hollywood to life in another language: his father-in-law Manfred Lehman has dubbed the German voices of Bruce Willis and Kurt Russell.

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## **Ren Wei, China – voice-over for Tom Cruise, John Travolta, Hugh Jackman**

Tom Cruise is a big star in China, where he even has his own nickname: Atang. To dub his dialogue for *Mission Impossible: III* (2006), the film company turned to hugely experienced voice-over artist Ren Wei, who joined the Shanghai Film Dubbing Studio in 1986.

In an [interview with \*The Guardian\*](#), Wei describes the process as an intense one. “While Atang ... had months to make the film, I had to do the whole thing – from learning the script to dubbing all the lines – in four days. We always have to rush because of the piracy problem in China. If we don’t get the translation and dubbing done quickly, an unauthorised version will be out on the streets before ours.”

Wei's versatility means that he has also provided the Chinese voice-over for John Travolta in *Broken Arrow* (1996), Ewan McGregor in *Moulin Rouge* (2001) and Hugh Jackman in *Kate and Leopold* (2001).

But while his speaking voice is clearly in demand, Wei's biggest dream is in music rather than acting: to become a tenor like his hero Pavarotti.

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## **Claudia Motta, Mexico – voice-over for Kirsten Dunst, Naomi Watts**

If you're a big superhero fan in Latin America, you've probably heard the voice of Claudia Motta.

The Mexican actor provided the Spanish dubbing for Kirsten Dunst in the 2002 version of *Spider-Man* and has since gone on to voice roles for the American star in films such as *Mona Lisa Smile* (2003) and *Wimbledon* (2004).

The actor told [The Guardian](#) about her approach to voice-over work. "I don't imitate the actor; I get into the personality of the role. I focus on the gestures and reflect that in my voice, even if there was no sound in the original. I add to the drama because, to dub well, you have to be as good an actor, or better."

The actor, who is most famous to Latin American audiences for providing the Spanish voice for Bart Simpson, fell in love with acting through her fascination with the spoken word in Japanese cartoons as a child.

And she's also very aware of the large regional market she is providing for. "Mexican dubbers mostly use a kind of neutral Spanish without accents or regional expressions so all Latin America can understand."

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## **Christian Brückner, Germany – voice-over for Robert de Niro, Robert Redford, Martin Sheen**

The [Hollywood Reporter](#) describes Christian Brückner as "the actor whose deep rumbling bass has been synonymous with Robert De Niro in Germany for nearly 40 years".

But, while consistently playing De Niro for German audiences, from his Oscar-winning days to his more recent comedic roles, Brückner has also voiced an enviable list of Hollywood legends, such as Robert Redford, Harvey Keitel and Martin Sheen.

In an [interview with DW](#), Brückner explained his approach. “Every role requires its subtle hues and shadows,” he said. “But it should never be a big exaggeration. The text, in its entirety, always stands above the performance, which should [complement] and be smaller than the text.”

In fact, Brückner’s association with de Niro goes back to the mid-70s when director Martin Scorsese handpicked the German actor to voice his leading man in German.

Eventually, his renown led him from behind the microphone to an on-screen role by one of Hollywood’s biggest directors: he had a German-speaking part in the 2009 film *Inglourious Basterds* by Quentin Tarantino.

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## Luca Biagini, Italy – voice-over for Harrison Ford, Bruce Willis, Colin Firth

Like Germany and Spain, the large majority of English-language films are dubbed into the native language in Italy. This practice dates back to the influence of Mussolini, who made it compulsory for foreign-language films to be re-voiced in Italian.

One of Italy’s most well-known voice-over professionals is [Luca Biagini](#), an actor who has dubbed stars such as Bruce Willis in *12 Monkeys* (1995), Michael Keaton in *Batman* (1989) and more recently Hugh Laurie in the television series *House* (2004-2012).

Talking of the challenges of dubbing, he gives the example of trying to recreate Colin Firth’s stutter in Italian for the leading role in *The King’s Speech* (2010).

“It’s a role that is close to my heart, but it wasn’t easy,” he said in an [interview with the BBC](#). “The aim was to recreate the voice without the viewer being aware of any synchronisation – a bit like magic or an illusion. Having the guidance of an intelligent director also helped.”

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## In conclusion

Dubbing is a hugely skilled art but at its best, as Schmid-Foß points out, it should be so well done that it’s not even noticed.

If you’d like to find out more about how to bring film, video or television content to life in new languages, we’d love to talk – write to us at [marketing@alphacrc.com](mailto:marketing@alphacrc.com).

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